

THAT WOODCHUCK.

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON.

THE Carter children were enjoying their vacation more than any vacation thus far in their young lives. A pleasant old farm-house sheltered them by night; a large, roomy barn was their resort on rainy days; while the great, wide out-of-doors was their grand playground the rest of the time—and never a summer had such short nights or so few rainy days! They explored the meadows and the pastures, sailed their tiny boats on the pond, and followed the winding brook to its fountain-head, and climbed the highest hill in the neighborhood, feeling as much exultation as they will feel in later years when they scale Mt. Washington or even Mont Blanc.

Upon one of their expeditions they discovered what they were sure must be a woodchuck's hole. Such a state of excitement as they were thrown into! Only Tom, Minnie, and Sadie were of the party; Jamie had gone to the village with his uncle, but would join them later.

"We must get that woodchuck!" said Tom.

"What's the good?" asked Minnie.

"Why, everybody gets a woodchuck when they have a chance!"

"But what for—are they good to eat?"

"No, I guess not; but the skin is good for strings, —it's awful tough, and makes good, strong strings to tie things with!"

"Humph! I should think twine would do just as well for us," persisted Minnie.

"Maybe we could sell the skin. Maybe the cat would like the flesh. Anyway, we've got to get that woodchuck!"

Then began the discussion of plans. Sadie was for digging the animal out—she had brought her spade, and she was sure that it could be done; but after they had all taken a turn at the hole, they gave that plan up as impracticable. Tom said:

"We'll have to smoke him out! We will wait until Jamie comes, and then we'll try that plan," and Tom seated himself on the top rail of a neighboring fence to wait the arrival of his brother.

"You needn't wait for Jamie," said Minnie. "He won't help."

"What's the reason he won't help?" asked Tom.

"Because he is a Band of Mercy boy, and he will say we ought to let the woodchuck live."

"Nonsense! he will be just as ready for the fun as the rest of us," insisted Tom; but, truth to tell, he was not so sure in his heart as his words implied.

Presently Jamie came running across the field, and was soon made acquainted with the state of affairs.

"If you'll stay here with the girls and watch the hole, I'll run back to the house and get matches, and we'll soon have the old fellow out!" said Tom.

"I don't see any sense or any fun in that," responded the newcomer.

Thereupon a lively dispute followed, a good-natured dispute, but a dispute nevertheless. The girls went over to Jamie's side of the question, and

Tom, finding he was to have no supporters, abandoned the scheme of smoking the woodchuck out of his hole. Then Jamie exclaimed:

"I almost forgot—Cousin Sue is waiting for us to go after cat-tails; but I must take a look at his majesty's mansion!" and he ran across the field to the spot that the others had indicated.

Taking off his hat he made a low bow, saying: "Good morning, Mr. Woodchuck! Why don't you ask me to walk in? Don't you know that I have saved your life, and can't you show a little gratitude!" But as Mr. Woodchuck did not respond to the friendly overtures, Jamie rejoined the others, and they were soon telling Aunt Mary about the woodchuck, and Tom was inclined to be vexed at the others because they would not fall in with his scheme.

"Don't you think it would have been good fun, Cousin Sue?" he asked.

"You boys make me think of a story that is told of Daniel Webster and his brother," said Cousin Sue.

"Will you tell us the story?" said Minnie.

"It is something like this:

"The brother had caught a woodchuck and was intending to kill it, but Daniel begged and pleaded for the animal's life. Not being able to come to any agreement, the boys referred the matter to their father, who told them that they might each argue their cause before him, and that he would be the Judge, and would decide which had the best of the argument. The brother began. Pointing to the poor, frightened, shrinking little prisoner, he set forth the reasons why the animal should forfeit its life. He told how it injured the clover and the cabbage patch, and dwelt upon the value of its skin for domestic purposes. It had now been caught and imprisoned, after considerable trouble, and he asked: "Would it not be an act of folly to let any sentimental weakness hinder the course of justice?" The Judge listened to the clear, ringing tones, the cool, logical utterances of his elder son, and thought that he had made out a pretty strong case against the prisoner. Then it was Daniel's turn. In a voice that trembled with emotion, he took up the cause of the woodchuck. He said that life was God given, that, when once taken, it could never, never be restored. He argued that, except in cases of stern necessity, man has no right to deprive even a woodchuck of life, he pictured the essential meanness of the thought that superior intelligence or superior strength could be lawfully used for the destruction of the weak. He scouted the idea of harm done to the crops by a few leaves being nibbled to sustain life, and coming back to this theme, the right of every creature to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, he pleaded so eloquently the cause of the woodchuck, that, in the middle of his pathetic appeal, the Judge, forgetting all the dignity of the office, started up with the tears rolling down his cheeks, and cried out, "Zeke, Zeke, you let that woodchuck go."

"I think," added Cousin Sue "that Daniel Webster was a Band of Mercy boy!"

Tom was still for a few minutes, then he said, "Cousin Sue, I am glad we did not smoke out the woodchuck."